

BOARD PRESS RELEASE FOR BIOLOGY CURRICULUM-11-19-04; reposted 12-14-04

**Dover Area Board of Directors
Biology Curriculum Press Release**

The Dover Area School District has issued the following statement concerning the District's Biology curriculum. The District had determined to delay any official pronouncement until the curriculum update and implementation were complete. The Dover Area School District has been committed to developing a curriculum that incorporates suggestions from the School Board, community, administration, teachers, and the District solicitor. The District now has a completed Biology curriculum and implementation procedure. In an attempt to clarify the District's policy and to correct any misinformation concerning the biology curriculum, the District states the following:

Over the past several months, the District's Board of Directors has been updating its Science and Biology curriculum and adopting and approving support materials, including textbooks. The School Board has undertaken considerable effort to develop and adopt a fair and balanced science curriculum. During the course of discussions about curriculum updates, numerous individuals and the media have made confusing, conflicting, and inaccurate statements. Many of these statements have been personal opinions or misinterpretations of District activities and curriculum directives. Some statements and opinions from the media, community members, and Board members, which are completely inaccurate or false, have been assumed to be official District policy or curriculum procedure. The following is the actual chronology of the District's Biology curriculum development process and implementation.

Teachers in the science department researched and recommended to the Administration the science textbook *Biology* (Prentice Hall) for its high school Biology class. The District adopted and purchased 220 copies of this teacher-and administration-recommended book.

The District also received a donation of 60 copies of *Of Pandas and People* (Haughton Publishing Company) and that book now is listed as a reference book in the curriculum. It is not a required text, but, in an effort to present a balanced curriculum, the book is made available to all students who wish to review it and the ideas that are presented in the text.

The Biology curriculum also was updated to include the following preliminary statement:

Students will be made aware of gaps/problems in Darwin's Theory and of other theories of evolution including, but not limited to, Intelligent Design. The Origins of Life is not taught.

In coordination with the science department teachers, the District solicitor, and the School Board, Mr. Michael Baksa, the Assistant Superintendent in charge of curriculum, developed the following procedural statement that will be read to all students as the new Biology curriculum is implemented beginning in January 2005:

The Pennsylvania Academic Standards require students to learn about Darwin's Theory of Evolution and eventually to take a standardized test of which evolution is a part.

Because Darwin's Theory is a theory, it continues to be tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the Theory exist for which there is no evidence. A theory is defined as a well-tested explanation that unifies a broad range of observations.

Intelligent Design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin's view. The reference book, Of Pandas and People, is available for students who might be interested in gaining an understanding of what Intelligent Design actually involves.

With respect to any theory, students are encouraged to keep an open mind. The school leaves the discussion of the Origins of Life to individual students and their families. As a Standards-driven district, class instruction focuses upon preparing students to achieve proficiency on Standards-based assessments.

The foregoing statements were developed to provide a balanced view, and not to teach or present religious beliefs. The Superintendent, Dr. Richard Nilsen, has directed that no teacher will teach Intelligent Design, Creationism, or present his or her, or the Board's, religious beliefs. The Dover Area School District supports, and does not discriminate against, students and parents who have competing beliefs, especially in the area of the Origin of Life debate. The School Board has noted that there are opinions other than Darwin's on the Origin of Life. School districts are forums for inquiry and critical discussions. The above statement and the District's revised Biology curriculum together provide an opportunity for open critical discussion--the real heart of scientific practice.

Mr. Baksa and Dr. Nilsen will monitor instruction to ensure that religion is neither inhibited nor promoted.

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